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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 GEORGETOWN 000254

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SUBJECT: INCSR Sparks Lively, Constructive Debate in Guyana

REF: GEORGETOWN 205

¶11. SUMMARY. The 2006 INCSR has resonated with the Guyanese public and generated considerable dialogue in the media in the two weeks since its release. All television and radio news programs carried the 2006 INCSR as their lead story on March 1 and the next morning. TV news and talk shows revolved around the INCSR for two weeks with coverage falling off only in the past few days. The INCSR was the main topic of 49 articles, editorials, columns, letters, cartoons, and advertisements in Guyana's three main daily newspapers in the two weeks following its release. Twenty-one of the forty-nine references to the INCSR occurred in the second week following its release, showing that the narco-trafficking story is not going away. The GoG has tried to shift the public's attention to the few positive (or at least innocuous) points in the report. The INCSR's release also coincided with a spate of brazen crimes in Georgetown believed to be associated with drug gangs (reftel). The result has been a lively public debate over the nexus between narco-trafficking, armed gangs, and political power in Guyana - a continuing debate that has given the INCSR story "legs" in the local media. END SUMMARY

Headlines

¶12. All three leading newspapers ran ominous headlines drawing attention to the INCSR's message, even the government-owned Guyana Chronicle. Following is a sample of INCSR-related headlines:

-- "Drugs corrupting Guyana on 'dangerous' scale" (March 2, Stabroek News, page 1)
-- "Endemic corruption still plaguing Guyana's drug fight" (March 2, Kaieteur News, page 3)
-- "Government inefficiency, other factors hindering anti-money laundering fight" (March 2, Kaieteur News, page 3)
-- "Drug gangs threaten Guyana's democracy" (March 2, Guyana Chronicle, page 1)
-- "Boycott drug lords businesses - Teixeira" (March 3, Stabroek News, page 1)

Editorials

¶13. The editorial pages of the independent Stabroek News and Kaieteur News have both used the INCSR as evidence with which to excoriate the GoG for its failure to make tangible headway in fighting narco-criminality. The Guyana Chronicle, on the other hand, has broadly accepted the report's conclusions, but has tried to deflect responsibility for the ineffective counter-narcotics fight away from the government and onto the society as a whole. Following are excerpts from the most pertinent editorials:

-- Kaieteur News, March 3: "A staggering assessment"
BEGIN TEXT. The US State Department's International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006 gives a staggering assessment of the perilous extent to which drug trafficking and money laundering have infiltrated and corrupted Guyana; all law-abiding residents of Guyana must pay the most scrupulous attention to the report and take urgent and appropriate action.

The report plainly states what many Guyanese have long suspected: that the drug trade and its spin-offs are deeply and dangerously entrenched in Guyana. The account pulled no punches as it spelt out the US State Department's current knowledge of how the drug trade has compromised Guyana's internal and national security and infiltrated every aspect of the social, political and economic fabric of the nation. . .

There is no question that the government and the law enforcement agencies in Guyana, who are the servants of the Guyanese people, were very much aware of the general picture painted by the US State Department's report on the drug trade. Therefore, the report might be a blunt appeal to the people of Guyana to hold their servants accountable for the debacle the nation's war on drugs has been so far. It is time for the masses of law abiding people of Guyana to put inexorable pressure on the government and the law enforcement agencies to get their act together and mount a much more convincing fight against the drug trade. END TEXT

-- Stabroek News, March 7: "Times that try men's souls"
BEGIN TEXT. . . . The ethnic politics has been with us for fifty

years but the really depressing new element, as highlighted by the recent US report, is the emergence of wealthy and ruthless drug traffickers who pose a threat to the state and its citizens. Ms Gail Teixeira, the Minister of Home Affairs, has attracted some attention, much of it critical, by suggesting that citizens should not shop at businesses owned by drug traffickers and should not socialise with them. Not, perhaps, the last word in a sophisticated counter-narcotics strategy, yet it had the distinct merit of taking a clear, moral position on this issue at a time when so many unfortunate compromises have been made by members of the government both in terms of concluding contracts with traffickers and money launderers and patronising their nightclubs. . . .

The truth is the government has shown no will or capacity to tackle this increasingly menacing problem. Its plan launched last year seems to have been stillborn, those tasked to deal with it have shown no energy or imagination, and citizens look on with despair as the situation continues to deteriorate and traffickers operate with virtual impunity and increasing violence. END TEXT.

-- Guyana (Sunday) Chronicle, March 12: "Giving due praise" BEGIN TEXT. Whatever the real or perceived shortcomings in responses by the Guyana Government and Police Force to drugs-related crime, they have been specifically commended in the 2006 Narcotics Report by the United States for their efforts in the battle against the illegal drugs trade. . . .

The reality today is that rather than sitting on the sidelines and criticizing the police or CANU - which agency continues its own commendable efforts - representatives of all sections of our society should be willing to offer all possible assistance to help ensure rapid and effective responses in the exposure, capture and trial of those among us bent on spreading fear and wasting lives by their terroristic and profit-seeking criminal activities. END TEXT.

Government Response

14. Answering a question about the INCSR March 3, President Jagdeo accused the U.S. of having "tremendous double standards" on drugs and crime. Jagdeo claimed that the U.S. has not provided adequate support for Guyana's drug fight. He also pushed responsibility for Guyana's narco-trafficking problem away from the GoG and onto the public at large, urging them to "help make the case" against drug dealers. Minister of Home Affairs Gail Teixeira called on Guyanese to boycott drug lords' businesses. This in turn sparked much controversy in the press because she did not divulge the names of such drugs lords and their businesses. Interestingly, neither did the press name names of well known narcotics traffickers.

15. The Government Information Agency (GINA) placed a full-page ad in the three leading newspapers March 12 under the headline "What the U.S. reports really said", referring to the INCSR and the 2005-06 Human Rights Report. The ad contended that the political opposition "deliberately ignored and misrepresented important elements of the reports" and provided several quotations from each report. For the ad, GINA selected excerpts that were either anodyne (i.e., "Guyana is also a member of the Organization of American States' Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission") or out of context (i.e., "Guyana launched its ambitious 2005-2009 National Drug Strategy Master Plan in June", failing to mention the INCSR's strong criticism that the GoG has not yet implemented any part of this plan). Post is actively working to inform the Guyanese public of the full extent of our counter-narcotics assistance to Guyana, including with an address by the DCM to the graduation ceremony of an FBI Community Policing course.

16. Former President of Guyana - and still the matriarch of the ruling PPP party at age 85 - Janet Jagan addressed the INCSR in her regular column for the Weekend Mirror, the PPP's organ. While calling the INCSR "worthy of deep consideration" by the GoG, her advice to the U.S. is to incarcerate and rehabilitate American drug users "by the millions, and then the drug trade would stop".

Electronic Media

17. All of the electronic media houses that feature news programs (including the state-owned TV and radio stations) carried the 2006 INCSR as their lead story on March 1 and the next morning. The private TV stations continued carrying follow-up news stories for several days thereafter. Television talk-shows continue to have segments on, or informed by, the INCSR. On several talk-shows the moderators and/or guests have had the INCSR with them on camera, going through the report paragraph by paragraph and repeatedly quoting text.

Comment

18. The 2006 INCSR has sparked a lively, constructive debate in Guyana. The independent media have relied heavily on the INCSR when criticizing the GoG for its lack of action in bringing drug traffickers to justice. But even though the INCSR refers explicitly to "known drug trafficker Shaheed 'Roger' Khan", no one has mentioned Khan's name in print or on the air for fear of retribution and/or legal action. Post believes that the INCSR and the resulting debate are having a positive impact - increasing pressure on the GoG to take concrete action against narco-criminality rather than just talk about it. END COMMENT.

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